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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 001835

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/19/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [IRAJ](#)
SUBJECT: GOAJ INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT USG POLICY
TOWARD IRAN - ACTION REQUEST

REF: A. BAKU 1761

[1](#)B. BAKU 1819
[1](#)C. BAKU 1700

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Classified By: Charge Jason P. Hyland for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Aliyev stated to the Ambassador that the USG and international community's policy towards Iran has "failed," that Iran is "confident, comfortable, and unconstrained," that he "does not understand USG policy on Iran" and, consequently, Azerbaijan's policy must be to "minimize potential risks" to Azerbaijan. Aliyev also said that Iranian President Ahmadinejad has affirmed that he has "burned his bridges" on the nuclear issue and warned Aliyev directly that Iran will "attack from where it is attacked." President Aliyev believes it is "always possible Iran will do something against us." President Aliyev's foreign policy advisor and the Foreign Minister have voiced similar concerns; the Foreign Minister has again told the Ambassador that Iran is planning various scenarios in response to heightened tensions or military action, which the GOAJ believes will include a provocation against Azerbaijani interests on the Caspian, where the international legal framework remains unclear. A recent anti-Azerbaijani editorial which appeared in the Iranian newspaper Jomhuri Eslami (reported incorrectly in the Azerbaijani press as having been written by Supreme Leader Khamenei) appears to be driving much of the GOAJ's concerns. In sum, the GOAJ at the most senior levels has communicated to us in stark terms their concern about the implications for Azerbaijani security of the current situation in Iran, and their desire to better understand USG policy to address it - and its implications. This will impact our ability to work with the GOAJ on a range of issues; we need to address their concern. End Summary.

President Aliyev on Iran

[1](#)2. (C) In a 23 November one-on-one meeting with the Ambassador, President Aliyev raised in stark terms his view that USG and the international community's policy on Iran has "failed" and that Iran is "confident, comfortable, and unconstrained." Aliyev said that he "does not understand USG policy" in response to this situation, adding that Ahmadinejad has affirmed he has "burned his bridges" on the nuclear issue and warned Aliyev directly that Iran will "attack from where it is attacked." Aliyev said he believes

it is "always possible Iran will do something against us" (ref a) and Azerbaijan's policy must be to minimize potential risks to itself. Also as reported earlier, Aliyev's Foreign Policy Advisor (ref b) and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov have voiced similar concerns. In a December 14 one-on-one meeting, Foreign Minister told the Ambassador again that Iran is planning various scenarios to respond to heightened tensions or military action, which Azerbaijan believes will include a provocation against Azerbaijani interests on the Caspian, where the international legal framework remains unclear.

Foreign Minister Mammadyarov on Iran

¶3. (C) In a December 14 one-on-one meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov said that recent Iranian activities (the fueling of demonstrations in Nardaran with respect to the anti-Islam article published in Sanat, recent demonstrations in front of the Azerbaijani Consulate General and Embassy - ref c) are intended to "send a message to us that they won't wait" while Azerbaijan moves towards NATO and the US, and on a possible resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. He pointed to a recent statement by Supreme Leader Khamenei that "Azerbaijan should not feel comfortable with respect to NATO," saying Iran is "watching our policy in this area very carefully." In addition, he said Iran "doesn't want us to make a move towards conflict resolution because they know the conflict is the only serious problem" facing Azerbaijan, and that if continued it keeps Azerbaijan off base and under pressure. He also said that Russia's and Iran's positions on this are very close.

¶4. (C) Mammadyarov repeated what he had told the Ambassador some months ago, that the Iranians are developing different "scenarios" for how they will react if the US or Israel

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increase the pressure on Iran over the nuclear issue. Mammadyarov feels that Azerbaijan is a "target" for Iran if there is the possibility of military action against Iran, which Iran "definitely" sees as being on the table. The GOAJ thinks that a provocation of some kind on the Caspian will be Iran's likely approach because whatever overt step Iran takes, it will want to be within the framework of international law, Mammadyarov said. There is no agreement on Caspian delimitation, the international legal framework is murky and "that is where Azerbaijan is vulnerable." However, Mammadyarov also said that Azerbaijan believes Iran is preparing scenarios for responses with respect to Lebanon, Iraq and "even in Syria." Iran is "afraid of the Taliban" and hence slow to consider any steps in Afghanistan. Iran may also create difficulties with respect to its land border with Nakhchivan (stopping buses, for example), with the aim of turning the population against the GOAJ and provoking "social problems" in Nakhchivan like those in Georgia. According to Mammadyarov, Azerbaijan is planning to build a railroad from Nakhchivan through Igdir, Turkey, as the next stage of the Kars-Alkhakhalaki-Tbilisi railroad in order to keep Nakhchivan from being cut off by Iran this way.

¶5. (C) Mammadyarov feels that Iran does not want Azerbaijan to make a move on N-K resolution because the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijani territory will make Azerbaijan stronger in the region. Mammadyarov believes that Iran does not want Azerbaijan, as a secular Muslim country, to succeed as a model. Poverty in the ethnic Azeri provinces in the north of Iran is "like the middle ages" and as people travel back and forth from Azerbaijan to Iran the contrast is evident. Mammadyarov argued that it is in Iran's national interest to see the conflict continue, and, hence, the Iranian government is exerting increased pressure at any sign of steps towards a resolution.

¶6. (C) Speaking to the role of religion, Mammadyarov

asserted that Islam in Azerbaijan is more a matter of "tradition" than ideology. Iran started playing with religion with the Sanat article and in Nardaran, hoping for a "uprising" from the people. When this did not succeed, Mammadyarov said that Iran's next step was the demonstrations at the Azerbaijani Embassy and Consulate General (ref b). He argued that Iran's aim is to portray the Government of Azerbaijan as bad Muslims, poor followers of Islam. Azerbaijan is going to continue its westward orientation, cooperation with NATO and the US but "without rhetoric to the public," Mammadyarov said. In Brussels, President Aliyev made clear that Azerbaijan will "continue and deepen our cooperation with NATO," moving to the second phase of its Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). Mammadyarov said that President Aliyev believes greater cooperation with NATO and a greater NATO presence and involvement in the region will bring predictability and stability. He said Aliyev was "very happy" with paragraph 43 of the Riga Summit statement; its language on regional conflicts was a "clear message to everyone north, south, east and west of Azerbaijan;" and, it helps him push back on those of his advisors who question what Azerbaijan gains from cooperation with NATO.

Supreme Leader Khamenei's Alleged Anti-Azerbaijan Comments

¶7. (C) A recent anti-Azerbaijani article which appeared in Jomhuri Eslami, a conservative Tehran daily, appears to have played a key role in raising concerns about Iran within senior GOAJ circles. The Azerbaijani press (to include the opposition newspaper Azadliq) quoted Supreme Leader Khamenei as having made numerous threats against Azerbaijan, even claiming Azerbaijan to be part of Iran, characterizing it as "Northern Iran" (a pointed dig at Azerbaijanis who refer to Azeri-populated areas of Azerbaijan as "Southern Azerbaijan"). In fact, the Jomhuri Eslami article widely disseminated in the Azerbaijani press was an editorial piece, not an article either written by or quoting the Supreme Leader. While critical of the Azerbaijani government (focusing on issues such as the Sanat article and closer ties with the US), the original editorial did not threaten Azerbaijan in as dire terms as suggested by the Azerbaijani media with reported quotes such as "we would like to remind politicians in Azerbaijan that the IRI has adequate power to realize the historic will of the people."

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Comment

¶8. (C) Given the complex relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, heated accusations in the press - and even overt threats by Iran - are not uncommon. The most recent bilateral spat occurred in March 2006, when Iran accused the GOAJ of supporting regime change by hosting in Baku a world congress of Azerbaijanis (including "Southern Azerbaijanis" who roundly criticized the IRI during the conference). However, President Aliyev's and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov's recent statements to the Ambassador reveal increasing levels of GOAJ concern about Iranian intentions and USG policy toward Iran. Embassy contacts have also noted that the level of Iranian rhetoric is sharper than in the past (although their views likely are based on the somewhat erroneous Azerbaijani press coverage of Iranian editorials). The GOAJ at the most senior levels has communicated to us its in stark terms concern about implications for Azerbaijani security of the current situation in Iran, and their desire to better understand USG policy to address it - and its implications. This will impact our ability to work with the GOAJ on a range of issues; we need to address their concern. We also note that the GOAJ has regular and broad contacts with Iranian officials and Aliyev and his key advisors, if engaged in regular dialogue, can provide us useful insights

on Iranian officials and intentions as seen from Baku. The Department's guidance on how to respond to Aliyev's concerns is requested.

HYLAND